Bella Coola Indians - Chapter IX

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son.

The latter did not answer immediately.

~~But~~ Later he ~~told~~ said to his father, "You were right," ~~in what you said"~~, and he told him ~~father~~ what had happened. ~~to him.~~

supernatural good luck as my parents described,"

"You have obtained, ~~wisdom~~ ", the old man replied simply.

Following his son's instructions the old man prepared canoes and boxes to bring back the flesh of the Mother of Snakes. They collected every scrap of it which they preserved very carefully, ~~They~~ and used small portions as bait to attract salmon to their weir with such success that they became wealthy.

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(no caps →) SKWANÄT'ÄN'A.

Another supernatural being from whom supernatural good fortune may be obtained is Skwanät'än'a, "The Female Mourner." When a chief dies she comes to wail, wandering through the woods near the village. Sometimes she can be seen in the form of a weeping woman. As she cries she ejects mucus from her nose, which solidifies into a glass-like substance about a foot in length. Anyone who sees her should take the transformed mucus, and wrap it in some article of his own clothing; it will bring him good fortune. About midnight of June 21, ~~23~~, 1922, the infant daughter of ~~Dan Nelson~~ a Bella Coola died, and about seven o'clock on the following morning the wailing was heard in the woods behind the missionary's house. ~~George Nelson,~~ The brother of the dead child's father, rushed off to try to find the weeping one. Luckily he did not succeed, because he did not know about collecting the mucus, and trouble would have come to him had he seen the supernatural being without knowing how to deal with it.

To hear Skwanät'än'a is in itself an omen of death, either to the hearer or to a member of his family. ~~George Nelson~~ The man who heard it on this occasion is not expected to have a long life, because he frequently has supernatural visions. Once he saw a headless man on the road between the old and the new villages of Bella Coola. It was night at the time and he endeavoured to strike matches to investigate the apparition more closely, but the matches would not ~~strike~~ light.

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It will be seen ~~by~~ from these stories that supernatural good fortune is usually obtained ~~from~~ by the slaying of some powerful creature. But, to the Bella Coola, every living creature is endowed with supernatural power; accordingly, any object ~~which he~~ that he obtains from a bird or animal which has acted in a peculiar ~~he~~ way is regarded as ~~an object~~ something from which supernatural good fortune may emanate, if it be kept for one year in the manner previously described.

Though the giant dead, the double-headed salmon, tlq qo kan i, and the ~~amax~~ 683 ~~686~~ are the bringers of the greatest good fortune [illegible] bestow it in an equal, or only slightly lesser, degree. Sometimes a trapper finds a piece of the thick bark of the fir in one of his traps. If he throw it away ~~neither~~ nothing happens, but if he conceal it in a hidden cranny for one year and then use it for bait he will have supernatural good luck. Another bringer of good fortune is a giant crab, about two feet in diameter, ~~which is~~ sometimes found far in the forest. There is no danger attached to the appearance of either of these manifestations of the supernatural, ~~they~~ which have merely the potential ability to bestow good fortune if the person seeing ~~either~~ them knows and practises the proper ~~methods.~~ ritual.

Sometimes, long ago, when a ~~flock~~ number of seals was seen approaching the shore a man would notice that ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ they were peculiar. A seal would disappear beneath the surface, to emerge as a beaver, the beaver would vanish beneath the waves only to ~~be supposed by~~ come up as a bear, a mountain goat, a deer, or some other animal. If a hunter wished to have phenomenal success at goat hunting, for example, he would wait until one of the seals appeared as a goat and then kill it. The carcass would drift ashore,

as a seal, but on being cut open a stone shaped like a mountain goat would always be found in the stomach. To obtain success the hunter must wrap this stone in a piece of worn clothing, and hide it away beneath an overhanging ledge in some lonely spot in the woods. If left there for one year the stone becomes a charm, and its owner, carrying it with him on his hunting expeditions, had ~~phenominal~~ amazing success. He had obtained ~~supernatural power~~, supernatural good fortune, for one particular object. If, after cutting open the seal-mountain goat, the hunter failed to wrap up the stone in some of his clothing it vanished of its own accord.

~~At the present time there is no~~ The last Bella Coola ~~who has~~ to have supernatural good fortune, from this source was Winäs, who died not many years ago. ~~was the last.~~ His extraordinary success as a hunter ~~being dependent on~~ was derived from a number of stones which he had obtained from his father ~~the animals~~ stomachs of seals ~~when they were~~ in the form of land animals. His success ended when he sold his collection of stones to a Bella Bella man who still uses them with great effect.

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1. ~~Insert A-1. In a piece of his own worn clothing and hide it~~

Supernatural good fortune has also been obtained from the "mothers" of certain plants.

(ho caps →)

THE MOTHER OF ÖKÄL.

Among the roots which are sought after when a man intends to give a potlatch are those of clover and of ökäl, a grass which grows on flats near the sea. On one occasion the aunt of an elderly Bella Coola woman now living dug up the Mother of ökäl. It was a root, thick as her thumb, but shaped like a woman. Perhaps the reason that she found it was because she was digging in the darkness, after the setting of the sun. The woman, ignorant of the proper prodedure, did nothing, with the result that her hands became painfully swollen. If she had been wise she would have wrapped the root in a portion of her used clothing and kept it hidden for one year, without saying anything about her find. Then it would have brought her supernatural good fortune.

Another woman, ~~the sister of my informant,~~ found an elderberry as large as a baseball, and shaped like the mask worn above the forehead by a member of the sisaok society. Her father, an old man skilled in such matters, wrapped the berry in his daughter's soiled clothing and kept it carefully hidden in her box. It brought her supernatural good fortune, because, no matter how much or how often she gave away presents, goods always came to her.

SUPERNATURAL GOOD FORTUNE FROM STONES.

Stones are among the objects from which supernatural good fortune can be obtained. A person who has long observed ceremonial chastity may be fortunate enough to hear what sounds to be the weeping of a new-born infant, as he passes in his canoe beneath some steep ocean cliff. Then, if he watches, he will see a stone being born from a larger stone at the level of the sea. If the observer takes the infant-stone, wraps it in his own soiled clothing and stores it among his possessions, it will act as other bringers of supernatural good fortune by ~~attracting~~ luring all kinds of valuables to the owner. ~~'s box~~. In fact, such a stone is said to be so potent that if ~~it be placed alone~~ left in an ~~box and left~~ empty for ~~a~~ some time, ~~when the box was reopened~~ it ~~would be full of~~ will attract enough to fill the receptacle skins, ~~attracted by the~~

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~~stone.~~ The last appearance of such a stone was in Dean Channel, to the father of an elderly Bella Coola, who was too ~~much~~ amazed to take advan-tage of it.

The writer was fortunate enough to see a stone which was regarded by the owner as having brought him good fortune. It had been obtained by one of his elderly relatives, deceased about fifteen years. This man had been walking beside the Bella Coola River one spring day when he happened to notice a wood-pecker perched on one of the posts sup-porting an olachen net. Without taking his eyes from it, he idly stoop-ed down and threw a stone at the bird which flew to the bank, lit on a pile of stones, and became one of them. Realizing that here might be the means ~~for~~ of obtaining supernatural good fortune, if properly handled, the man watched for some time, then went forward, picked up the stone, covered it with evergreen boughs and wrapped the whole in a strip torn from the white-man's shirt he was wearing. With the axe he was carry-ing he cut a recess in a tree, ~~placed~~ put the stone in it and covered the hiding place with the original bark. He said nothing about it, but the stone brought him such good fortune that he obtained large quantities of everything desirable.

In later years the man, after replacing the stone in the hole of the tree, went away to Victoria; when he returned, years later, it was still there. By placing it in his box he again prospered in all his ventures. When an old man the owner presented the stone to my informant who still treasures it. It is red, about a foot in length, shaped like the accompanying sketch. It somewhat resembles a human figure without arms or legs, but with prominent navel opening.

My informant has kept this stone for years, hiding it even from his wife, and allowing no white man to see it. He had been perfectly willing to have photographs taken of most of his ceremonial objects, but declined to permit this to be done with his valued stone,

stone. The last appearance of such a stone was in Deep Channel, to the father of an elderly Bella Coola, who was too much amazed to take advantage of it.

The writer was fortunate enough to see a stone which was regarded by the owner as having brought him good fortune. It had been obtained by one of his elderly relatives, deceased about fifteen years. This man had been working beside the Bella Coola River one spring day when he happened to notice a wood-pecker perched on one of the poles supporting an olachen net. Without taking his eyes from it, he idly stooped down and threw a stone at the bird which flew to the bank, lit on a pile of stones, and became one of them. Realizing that here might be the means for obtaining supernatural good fortune, it properly handled the new watched for some time, then went forward, picked up the stone, covered it with evergreen boughs and wrapped the whole in a strip torn from the white man's shirt he was wearing. With the axe he was carrying he cut a recess in a tree, placed the stone in it and covered the hiding place with the original bark. He said nothing about it, but the stone brought him much good fortune that he obtained large quantities of everything desirable.

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and carefully hid it in a box after showing it. When he wished to use the stone it was wrapped in his old shirt, with a small amount of money, or whatever object was desired, placed in ~~one of~~ the hollow, held in position by the wrapping, and then set in a window of his house so that the sun could fall on one uncovered end of the stone. The owner ~~My infor~~ firmly believes that this stone had brought him money on various occasions, and will do so again, though whether he expected the coins to be found inside of the wrapping, or merely that they would come to him in the course of trade is questionable. According to Bella Coola belief, they ought to appear beside the stone, but ~~as my informant~~ the man at- tributed any good fortune to ~~his mind~~ it, he never had any difficulty in [illegible] the coins.

This stone is also used as a means of increasing the efficacy of prayer. When the owner washes ceremonially in the river before eat -ing in the morning, he rubs the stone over his body as if it were soap and [illegible] it make him strong, and did tell, that his desires are [illegible].

Finally the story was followed illustrating the obtaining of supernat -ural good fortune through a gift from one of the supernatural beings. In substance this story resembles that of the Bella Coola type yet is it the only case known to the writer of supernatural good fortune being obtained in this manner. Accordingly the following story should prob- -ably be regarded as a mere adaptation to literary form of an experi- -ence usually recounted in some other manner.

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SHAMANISM

More important to the Bella Coola than any other manifestation of the supernatural is that power which makes an individual either an ałukwala or an ask nkots. The former is a person who, owing to ability granted him by a supernatural being, is able to perform miraculous feats, especially in curing the sick; the latter is one with similar powers obtained from a ghost (1). It is impossible to translate either of the these terms accurately; the designation "shaman" is accordingly used in this monograph to describe both types of supernaturally endowed individuals, though it must be clearly understood that nothing more than a resemblance to the shamans of Siberia is implied. In Bella Coola the most common and most important method of obtaining such power is from a living supernatural being; a person receiving the boon in this manner will be termed "shaman", while one empowered by a ghost will be known as "shaman of the dead".

The Bella Coola believe that long ago men were so much more powerful than at present and so close to the supernatural that all were virtually shamans. The prowess and adventures of these demi-gods of antiquity are favorite themes for stories. The powers of the later shamans have been far less tahn those of their forefathers, and their exploits have been of a somewhat different character. Hence it is possible to divide the subject into two sections:

A. Shamanism in the distant past.

B. Shamanism in the present or recent past.

SHAMANISM IN THE DISTANT PAST.

Information on this phase is contained in stories and a few anecdotes which describe the achievements of ancient demi-gods, endowed with miraculous powers of various kinds. The tales are similar in type to those dealing with the granting of supernatural aid to the unfortunate, so that it is often difficult to differentiate them. As might be expected these narratives are not exact. Frequently the teller does not know from what being the ancient shaman received his power, nor can he explain the abilities described, which are different from and superior to those with which he is familiar.

(1). Ghosts are, of course, supernatural, but as the Bella Coola differentiate between shamans whose powers are derived from these two sources, it is accurate to follow their example.

In fact it is customary to describe any mythical hero as a shaman.

Tales of this kind can be related by any one; They are not the personal property of a specific family. Many of them, that of Waowal is, for example, are very well known and are told and retold constantly.

In addition to information obtained from stories a few isolated facts are remembered regarding ancient shamans. It is thought that various taboos connected with hunting were learnt by them in the distant past. Such restrictions and injunctions were firmly believed in and srictly adherred to until a few years ago, and many of them are still observed. The usual method of hunting Harlequin Duck is, or was until recently, from a canoe, with a sapling set up in the bow to hide the hunter, crouched with bow and arrow in readiness; several shamans, however, were able to kill the birds by merely waving the butt-end of a paddle towards them. Such power would be of enormous value, the Bella Coola consider these ducks a great delicacy, and say that their flesh resembles that of seals. In fact, when an invitation to a seal feast is given the words used mean, "come to eat Harlequin Ducks."

No attempt was made to collect all the shaman stories current in Bella Coola, but the subject should be amply illustrated by those gathered (1) of which the following is representative.

(1). See Chap.IX, cont. for additional stories of this type.

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(1). See Chapter IX. cont.

THE ADVENTURES OF WAOWAL IS.

Long, long ago, there dwelt among the people who lived on the shore of Dean channel and were part Kimsquit, part Bella Bella, a mighty hhaman, Waowal is. He was a married man with a son just learning to walk, and an adopted one about twelve years old. One day Waowal is told the latter to fetch water, but the lad was lazy and made no motion to obey, so his foster father kicked him angrily. Whereat the boy cried out:

"What are you hurting me for? Why don't you kick your wife or your partner? They are always sleeping together when you are away."

Waowal is apparently paid no attention to this, merely saying:

"Stop crying. I am sorry I kicked you so hard. Run along and get the water."

Waowal is, who was a great hunter, began to get his canoe ready for a seal hunting trip, and told his adopted son to accompany him. The two set off within a few hours. Waowal is owned a stick of which one end contained the power of causing death, and the other of restoring life; he had only to make the motions of throwing this stick at a living creature, death-dealing end in front, and the one at which it was pointed fell dead Many seals had been killed by this means when Waowal is asked the boy:

"What was it you said when I kicked you?"

By this time the lad had regained his temper and was sorry he had disclosed what he knew.

"I said nothing," he answered, "but gave a shout of pain."

"You liar," Waowal is calmly replied. "You said that my wife was sleeping with my partner."

The boy, realising that all was known, answered truthfully:

"Yes, I did say that. I have often seen her doing so when you were absent."

It was late afternoon by this time an Waowal is at once headed back to the village, which they reached soon after dark. No one saw their approach, s Waowal is told the boy to stay with the canoe and the seals on the beach while he went to the twn to investigate. He cautiously crawled to the outside of the house at the point where he knew his wife would be sleeping; there he scratched on the wall with his finger nail, making a noise like a mouse. He heard his wife say:

"I wish that [illegible]